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Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 IO-13 HA-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02
SS-15 ICA-11 PC-01 AID-05 OMB-01 SCS-06 CA-01
SY-05 A-01 OPR-02 MCT-01 ACDA-12 EUR-12 OC-06
CCO-00 /135 W
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R 081100Z JUN 78
FM AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7788
INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN
AMCONSUL DURBAN
AMEMBASSY GABORONE
AMEMBASSY MASERU
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO
AMEMBASSY MBABANE
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

C O N F I D E N T I A L JOHANNESBURG 1446

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, PINT, SF
SUBJECT: SOWETO GIRDS FOR JUNE 16TH

REF: PRETORIA 3203

1. SUMMARY: AS SOWETO NEARS THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF THE JUNE 16, 1976 DISTURBANCES, THE NATURAL CONCERN IN THE WHITE COMMUNITY, PARTICULARLY AMONG POLICE OFFICIALS, IS WILL THERE BE A REPEAT OF THE EXTENSIVE VIOLENCE THAT ROCKED SOWETO? EFFORTS OF THE GOVERNMENT TO CALM SOUTH AFRICA'S LARGEST BLACK TOWNSHIP, INCLUDING THE OCTOBER 19 DETENTIONS AND BANNINGS, WILL LARGELY BE JUDGED BY THE DEGREE OF QUIET THAT PREVAILS IN THE NEXT THREE WEEKS. PRACTICALLY SPEAKING, SOWETO'S POLICE COMMANDER, BRIG. JAN VISSER, IS
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GEARED TO MEET ANY THREAT OF VIOLENCE WITH A MASSIVE SHOW OF POLICE POWER. BLACK COMMUNITY LEADERS, AS REPRESENTED BY DR. NTATHO MOTLANA OF THE COMMITTEE OF TEN, SAY OBSERVANCES WILL BE DIGNIFIED AND PEACEFUL. SOWETO STUDENTS ARE STILL DISORGANIZED AND APPEAR TO LACK LEADERSHIP TO MOUNT ANY CAMPAIGN AGAINST GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS OR INSTITUTIONS. END SUMMARY.

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2. SOWETO, HOME OF SOUTH AFRICA'S LARGEST AND MOST POLITICIZED URBAN BLACK POPULATION, SOON FACES ITS SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF THE TRAGIC EVENTS OF JUNE 16, 1976. WHILE THE MEMORY OF THOSE DAYS IS STILL FRESH IN THE MINDS OF BLACK AND WHITE COMMUNITIES ALIKE, THE PREVAILING MOOD SEEMS TO BE ONE OF SORROW AND REMEMBRANCE RATHER THAN ANGER. WHILE GOVERNMENT AND POLICE OFFICIALS FEEL THEY HAVE BROKEN THE BACK OF BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH THE BANNINGS AND DETENTIONS OF LAST OCTOBER, THERE IS PRACTICAL CONCERN THAT THE POTENTIAL OF RENEWED VIOLENCE IS THERE.

3. SOWETO POLICE GRIGADIER JAN VISSER HAS PASSED ALONG INFORMATION ON HIS PREPARATIONS, INCLUDING A CRACKDOWN ON FLEDGLING BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS AZANIA PEOPLE'S ORGANIZATION (AZAPO) AND THE SOWETO ACTION COMMITTEE (SAC), NEITHER GROUP IN FACT HAVING MADE ANY GREAT PROGRESS IN TERMS OF GAINING A WIDE FOLLOWING. VISSER SAID POLICE PRECAUTIONS WILL BE LARGELY A REPEAT OF LAST YEAR, WITH A MASSIVE POLICE PRESENCE, INCLUDING ROAD BLOCKS AND BODY SEARCHES. IT WAS INTIMATED THAT RIOT POLICE WILL, ONCE AGAIN, BE TRUCKED IN FROM NEIGHBORING AREAS TO AUGMENT VISSER'S 1200 MAN FORCE. VISSER, AS LAST YEAR, APPEARS DEDICATED TO MINIMIZING CONFRONTATIONS AND WILL USE NON-LETHAL
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CROWD CONTROL DEVICES SUCH AS SMOKE/TEAR GAS MACHINES AND BATONS AS LONG AS THE SITUATION IS UNDER CONTROL.

4. VISSER DID EXPRESS THE WORRY THAT INDIVIDUAL POLICE MAY RUN GREATER RISK OF AMBUSH FROM SMUGGLED WEAPONS. HE SAID RAIDS HAVE TURNED UP GREATER QUANTITIES OF EASTERN-BLOCK WEAPONS AND EXPLOSIVES IN SOWETO. THE FEAR ON THE PART OF POLICE THAT THEY MAY BE AMBUSHED MAY CAUSE THEM TO BE LESS INCLINED TO ACCEPT VISSER'S INSTRUCTIONS TO USE RESTRAINT WHEN CONFRONTED BY UNRULY CROWDS.

5. FOR ITS PART, THE BLACK COMMUNITY HAS DISAVOWED ANY PLANS OR INTEREST IN CONFRONTATIONS. LEONARD MOSALA, PERCY QOBOZA, AND DR. NTATHO MOTLANA HAVE TOLD OF PLANS FOR MEMORIAL SERVICES TO COMMEMORATE THE RIOTS OF TWO YEARS AGO. EVEN AMONG STUDENTS THERE SEEMS TO BE A LACK OF BITTERNESS OVER THOSE EVENTS. STUDENTS FORMERLY INVOLVED IN THE SOWETO STUDENTS REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL AND ITS DORMANT SUCCESSOR, THE SOWETO STUDENTS LEAGUE, CONFESS THAT SOWETO IS "QUIET" WITH NO PLANS FOR VIOLENT DEMONSTRATIONS. IT

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IS CLEAR, HOWEVER, THAT NEITHER SIDE FULLY RESPECTS THE OTHER'S PROFESSED INTENTIONS TO "KEEP THE 16TH PEACEFUL".

6. WHILE AT THIS POINT ON ACKNOWLEDGES THE APPARENT INTENTION OF BOTH SIDES TO AVOID ANOTHER TRAGEDY, THE POTENTIAL FOR CONFLICT CONTINUES TO BE VERY REAL. SOWETO WILL BE THE SCENE OF THOUSANDS OF MOURNERS, CONSTANTLY CONFRONTED BY HUNDREDS OF RIOD POLICE IN CAMOUFLAGE GEAR (THE "ACTION" UNIFORM OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE). IF EMOTIONS HAVE BEEN NUMBED SUFFICIENTLY, IF THE OCTOBER 19 CRACKDOWN ON BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS WAS EFFECTIVE AND IF JAN VISSER'S MEN OBSERVE HIS RULES OF CONDUCT, THEN THIS WILL LARGELY CONFIDENTIAL

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DETERMINE WHETHER OR NOT JUNE 16TH OF THIS YEAR IS TO BE ANOTHER BLACK MARK IN SOUTH AFRICA'S TURBULENT HISTORY OF RACIAL CONFRONTATIONS.
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